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Here's another throwback - this time, to a pretty eye-opening diplomatic moment that I covered for Reuters back in 2016...

“JERUSALEM/MOSCOW (Reuters) - With the Obama administration in its final months, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been a more frequent and feted visitor to Moscow than Washington…” That was the lead of a news analysis I was co-bylined on almost a decade ago, recounting firsthand experience witnessing the development of an eyebrow-raising, unlikely bromance between the democratically elected Israeli leader and the Russian strongman.

By then, Putin was firmly into his indeed eternal iron-fist rule over the police state that Russia had become under him. He was also propping up the Assad regime, which had inflicted suffering on its people to eradicate the remnants of the Arab Spring. In hindsight, Putin was also preparing for the full-scale military invasion of Ukraine in 2022 - his now-forever war.

On that overcast, rainy day in Moscow in June of 2016, Netanyahu and Putin addressed the most prominent political, business, and arts elites from both nations gathered at the Bolshoi. This was followed by a joint gala concert by performers from Russia's world-renowned opera house/ballet venue and The Israeli Opera - האופרה הישראלית. Earlier that day, Netanyahu - on his fourth trip to Russia in less than a year - and Putin met with the press after Russian-Israeli talks in the Kremlin. I am pictured here covering the event. (I also reported on other Netanyahu/Putin/Medvedev bilats, including the 2015 Paris Agreement summit and the 2016 Munich Security Conference.)

Four years later, at yet another rendezvous, Netanyahu would thank his “friend” Putin for pardoning Naama Issachar, an American-Israeli woman who was arrested during a stopover at a Moscow airport in 2019 while travelling home from India. The Russian police, known for their brutality but not their credibility, claimed to have found nine grams of cannabis in her luggage, for which she was sentenced to seven and a half years in a (Russian, mind you) prison.

Putin pardoned Issachar after she had spent ten months in jail. This orchestrated show of clemency occurred only after Putin's photo op in Jerusalem, during which the mom of the jailed backpacker implored him and received a magnanimous response: "I'll bring the girl home." The incident further fueled the Kremlin’s appetite for hostage diplomacy: Evan Gershkovich and Paul Whelan were still free, but on the horizon.

Remarkably, there’s no mention of Trump in this Reuters story. Although Obama was in the lame-duck stretch of his term, it is common knowledge that hardly anyone predicted the arrival of

the Trump presidential era - the "transformational" one, as Canadian PM Mark Carney would diplomatically describe it almost ten years later...

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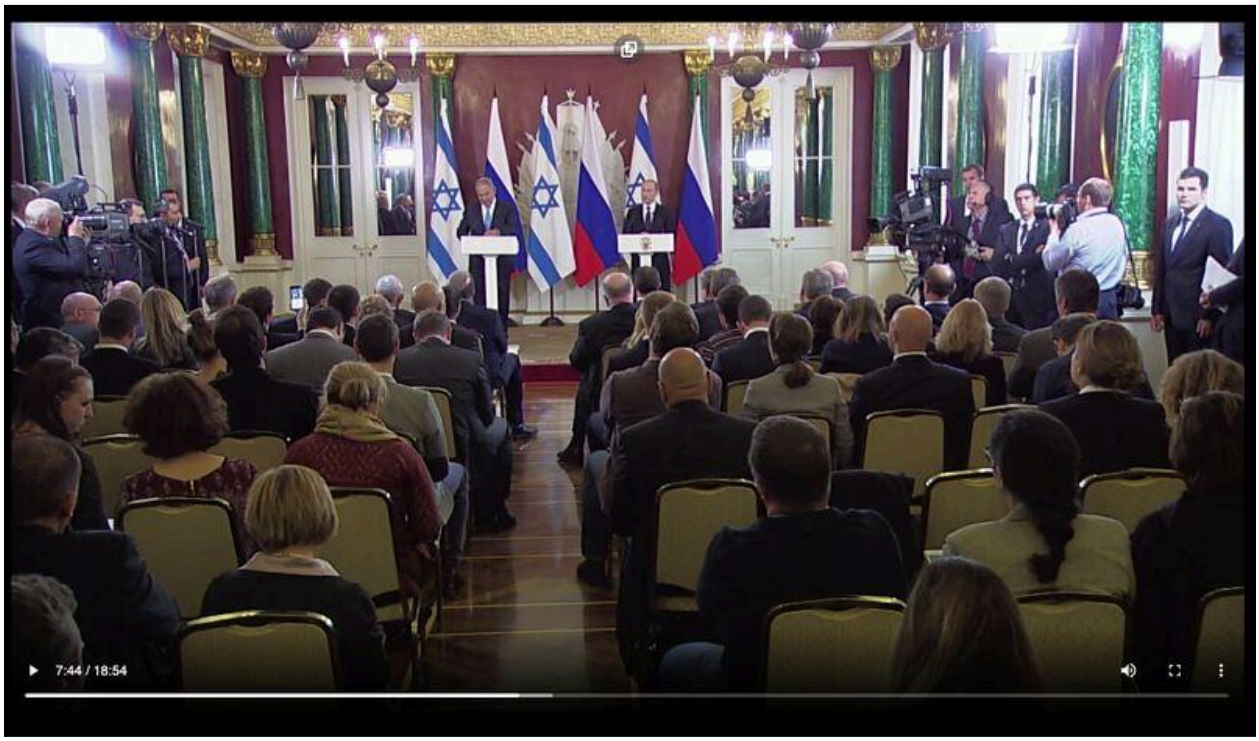
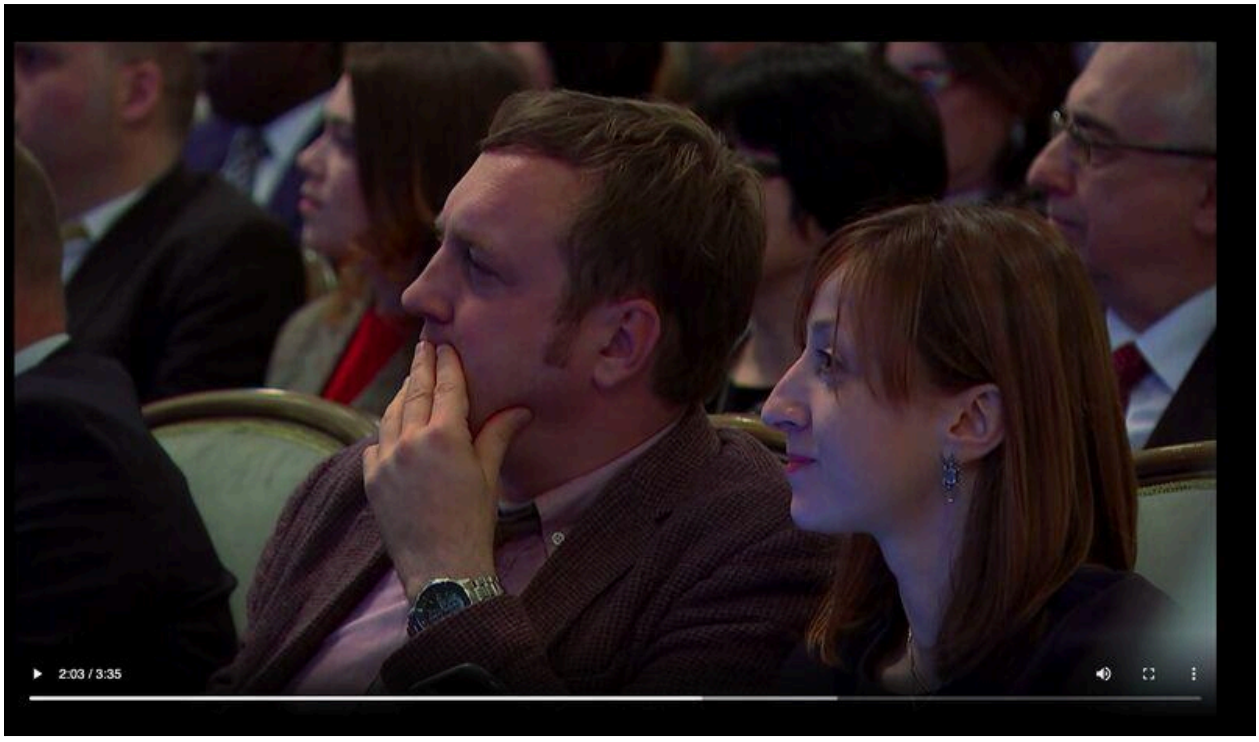
Personal reflections / not GC views

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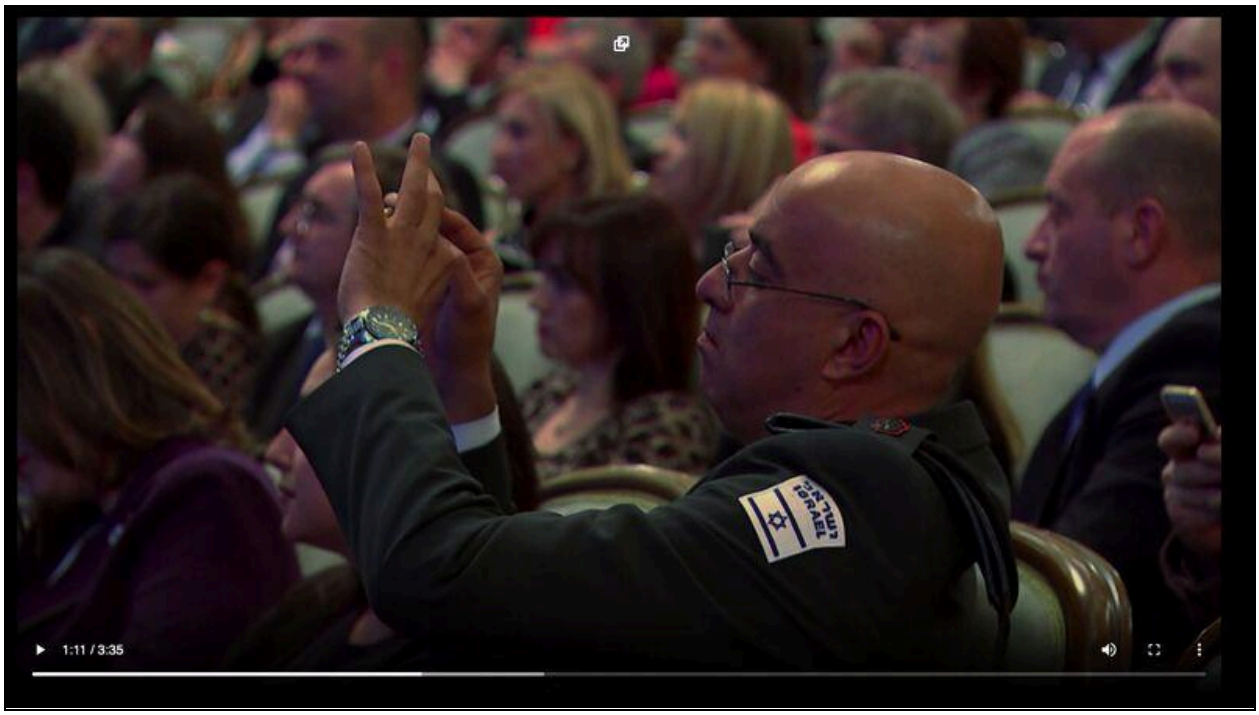
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Владимир Путин и Премьер-министр Израиля Биньямин Нетаньяху с супругой посетили Государственный академический Большой театр, где состоялся торжественный концерт артистов Большого театра России и Израильской оперы, посвящённый 25-летию восстановления дипломатических отношений между Российской Федерацией и Государством Израиль.

7 июня 2016 года 21:15 Москва

2:50 / 3:35

9:23 / 18:54

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June 7, 2016 18:30 The Kremlin, Moscow

With Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The two leaders discussed current issues of bilateral cooperation, including the further strengthening of trade and economic cooperation as well as cultural and humanitarian